



The Bellicose Birth of Euro-Islam in Berlin

From The Introductory Exploration by Jörn Thielmann

The paper by Wolfgang G. Schwanitz addresses a subject so far ignored in German-Muslim relationship, namely the re-invention of jihad by the German Foreign Office to fight the British, French, and Russian in the First World War, and the persistence of this ideology. The Deutsche Orient-Gründerjahre (German Orient founding years) started in 1884 with an intensification of the economic, cultural and military relations to the Middle East. Berlin's foreign policy in the region until 1914 emphasised maintaining the status quo, pertaining a secondary policy with peaceful penetration of the region, and mediating in Oriental conflicts. The main focus on the German foreign policy was Europe.

At the end of the 19th century, the archaeologist and diplomat Max von Oppenheim developed a jihad-ideology aimed at mobilising Muslims in a revolution against the British, French and Russian colonialists. In 1914, the German Reich urged the Ottoman Empire to declare a jihad against England, France and Russia. To spread the jihad ideology, the Orient-Nachrichtenbüro (Orient News Department) under Max von Oppenheim was established in the Foreign Office where German scientists and Muslim scholars worked together. Germany invested money and material for pushing forward jihad by propaganda—newspapers, films, leaflets also in Arabic, Turkish, French, and Greek—and conspiratorial activities. Hereby, Germans created an ideology of a global religious war.



Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husaini

After the German defeat in 1918, the contacts to the Middle East remained vivid, and the living conditions for Muslims in Germany were quite good, allowing even for various journals and newspapers. In Berlin and other places students, intellectuals, politicians and merchants founded clubs and associations in the 1920s. The Lebanese politician Shakib Arslan, for example, established the Oriental Club in 1921. In April 1922, the Islamic Community in Berlin was founded by Abd al-Jabbir Khairi, who constructed the first mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf (inaugurated in 1925 and still existing). Some Arabs, like the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husaini, frequented the Nazis, but the Nazis became interested in Muslims only after the outbreak of the Second World War. Max von Oppenheim wrote a new memorandum in favour of jihad, but the German Foreign Office was divided, with the minister von Ribbentrop pro-jihad, and the secretary of state von Weizsäcker against.

However, the introduction of an anti-imperial and revolutionary ideology into the Middle East by the Germans had a long lasting impact, from the Muslim Brotherhood and Sayyid Qutb to the Afghan mujahidin and Usama Bin Ladin. The Germans also introduced racism in the Arab-Jewish conflict. So, Schwanitz speaks of a particular form of Islam, invented by the Germans, which he calls Euro-Islam. A reform of this type of Euro-Islam is absolutely necessary.